

Museum policy in the Netherlands

Definition of Museum

The ICOM definition of museums is generally accepted in The Netherlands. Zoological gardens, exhibition spaces, planetariums, science centres and nature reserves are excluded from museums statistics. According to the most recent statistics, there were 775 museums in the Netherlands in 2005. As 395 museums do not have paid staff, the number of professionally run museums was 380.

Laws and rules

There is no museum law in the Netherlands. In the absence of a Museums Act, the activities of the Netherlands Museum Association (Nederlandse Museum Vereniging, NMV) are aimed at development and improvement of professional museum standards. In 2008 440 museums were member of the NMV.

The members of the NMV have to observe the Code of Professional Ethics for Museums in the Netherlands. This Code, based on the ICOM Code of Professional Ethics, was introduced in 1989 and revised in 1999. The NMV introduced a national registration scheme for museums in 1997: the Netherlands Museum Register. This register, inspired by the national Registration Scheme in the United Kingdom, is founded on a number of basic requirements drawn up by the museum sector itself. Authoritative representatives of the sector subsequently assess the performance of the museums. Museums wanting to be incorporated in the Museum Register have to meet the following basic requirements:

- Having an institutional basis
- Having a stable financial basic
- Having a written policy plan
- Having a collection
- Having a registration of its collection
- Taking care of the preservation of the collection
- Having the collection researched
- Having basic public amenities
- Having qualified museum staff

380 museums were registered until 2008. This mean that practically all professionally run museums are incorporated in the Netherlands Museum Register.

Other activities of NMV include the distribution of the annual *Museum Pass*, holders of which have free admission to some 400 museums in the country,¹ and maintaining a network of museum consultants in the provinces.

¹ A Museum Pass for adults costs 35 euros a year, for young people: 17, 50.

These consultants support and facilitate the work of small museums in their province, usually run by volunteers.

Probably the most important legislation that affects museums and their collection is the *Cultural Heritage Preservation Act* (1985). This act prevents the export of objects that are important for the cultural history of the Netherlands.

Private individuals and businesses, who donate to museums, are exempt from gift and inheritance tax and are eligible for a reduction in income or corporate tax.

Recent developments in the museum policy

27 of the 775 museums in the Netherlands are subsidised by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This group includes the biggest and the most visited museums in the country, as the Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam or the Netherlands' Open Air Museum in Arnhem. Until now there was no difference in the financing of the museums and other subsidised cultural institutions, such as orchestras or theatre companies. All subsidised cultural organization received grants from the Ministry for the duration of four years, the so called "Cultural Plan Period". From 2009 on this situation will change. This is a consequence of a policy paper on museums: *The Future of the Past (Bewaren om te weeg te brengen)* presented to Parliament by the former State Secretary for Culture Medy van der Laan in November 2005. Major alterations in museum policy are proposed in this document. Museums that are subsidised by the Ministry are leaving the 4 year funding system. Instead, the Ministry settles management contracts with the museums, stipulating the conditions for long-term funding (30 years). The grants cover the running costs of the museums, such as staff, housing, upkeep of the collections, new acquisitions and exhibitions. Management contracts also include a periodical assessment of performance of the museums by a visiting committee of (inter)national experts. Not counting the running costs, additional funding will be available for specific activities of the museums aiming at, *inter alia*, increasing participation of target groups (youth, ethnical minorities), upkeep and presentation of the cultural heritage of minorities and heritage education programmes for school children. An earmarked budget for such activities will be transferred to the public cultural Fund Mondriaan Foundation [*Mondriaan Stichting*]. All museums in the country, and thus not only museums subsidised by the Ministry qualify for grants from this budget.

This development can be considered as the completion of the privatisation of national museums. The Privatisation of the National Museum Act was passed by the parliament in 1993. All national museums were accommodated in foundations. Although the buildings and the collections remain the property of the state, the museums enjoy a high degree of independence as far as their functioning and policy are concerned. The *Deltaplan for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage (1990-2000)* introduced the project of *Collectie Nederland (Collection Netherlands)*, that takes the whole cultural heritage of the country, rather than the collections of individual museums, as the base for museum policy. A separate government agency, *The Cultural Heritage Inspectorate (Inspectie Cultuurbezit)* supervises the preservation and upkeep of this national collection.

National historic museum

To improve the historic and cultural knowledge of the population, a temporary advisory committee, established by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, advised (2006) on the shape and content which this cultural canon should have. It was proposed to introduce a *Canon of the Netherlands* consisting of 50 key facts and key collection items of Dutch history and culture, to be presented in an appealing and inspiring educational setting. The Canon can be accessed digitally; 50 “windows” open to short stories that illustrate the significance of the relevant component of the canon (see www.entoen.nu). Examples of other canons can be found on this website too, for instance canons restricted to the arts and culture sector (books, literature, writers, architecture, theatre, children and youth movies etc.). The *Canon of the Netherlands* is part of the 10 point cultural participation plan Minister Plasterk introduced in his policy memorandum *Art for Life's Sake (Kunst van leven, 2007)*.

At the same time, the government, following the example of *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, decided to create a *National History Museum*. 3 municipalities – Amsterdam, Arnhem and The Hague – were invited to develop plans for such a museum that – based on the canon – should give all inhabitants of the country an overview of the Dutch history. The *Netherlands Open Air Museum (Nederlands Openluchtmuseum)* in Arnhem won the competition. Subsequently the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Ronald Plasterk choose to erect the *National History Museum* in that city. It goes without saying that the museum will also be present on the world wide web and that digital media will play an important part in the presentation of its collection.

Digitization of audiovisual heritage

In 2007 the government decided to spend 154 million euros from the so called Fund for the Reinforcement of Economic Structure (FEZ) for the digitization of the Netherlands' audiovisual heritage. This project, called *Images for the Future (Beelden voor de toekomst)*, will run for 7 years and aims at restoration, preservation and digitization of 137.000 hours of video, 22.510 hours of film, 123.900 hours of audio and 2.9 million photos from audiovisual archives. This material should be easily accessible for target groups such as schools and other educational institutions, as well as for the general public and the creative sector. Innovative service and applications are used to realize maximum accessibility (see also www.beeldenvoortetekomst.nl). The main participants in this project are the *Filmmuseum* in Amsterdam, *the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid)* in Hilversum, which is in fact the museum and the archive of the national public broadcasting service, and the *National Archive (Nationaal Archief)* in The Hague.

Youth

As in other countries, most Dutch primary school organise visits to the museum. Such visits are expected to become an important part of the curriculum, when the *Canon of the Netherlands* will become an obligatory subject in primary schools in the school year 2009/2010. In the fall of 2008, the Dutch parliament agreed on free entrance to all museums in the country for children up to 12 years old. It is hoped that this step will stimulate visits to the museums, especially by children from underprivileged social strata. In addition, some museums provided free access to young people until 18 years of age.

Cultural diversity

Besides the youth, ethnic minorities, which make up about 10 % of the population, are an important target group in museum policy. In this context, the Netherlands Museum Association (*Nederlandse Museumvereniging*) developed an *Intercultural Museum Programme* to introduce more variety into the presentations of Dutch museums as well as introducing the museums to a wider public. Fostering of cultural diversity is also a priority of the Mondriaan Foundation. This Foundation, founded and financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, has introduced a *Development Award for Cultural Diversity* targeted at Dutch museums. It is endowed with 500 000 euros. The award is meant for the best strategic plans for programming and communicating special exhibitions especially geared towards attracting minority audiences. In 2006, it was awarded for the first time to the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. For more information see:

http://www.sgallery.net/news/05_2006/21.php A tender for the second round of the award started in the spring 2008.

Returning work of arts

A special committee of independent experts was set up in 2004 to survey some 4000 work of arts that were returned to the Netherlands after World War II. The works were in custody of the state. This committee tried to trace the original owners and consequently advised the government on the return of cultural property from the war. The most important case until now was the return of 202 paintings of old masters to the heirs of Jacques Goudstikker (1897-1940) in 2006. Although this matter has been legally settled after the war, the government decided to return the paintings not on judicial but on moral grounds.

References

For a concise outline of the museum policy in the Netherlands see: *Cultural Policy in the Netherlands*. The Hague/Amsterdam: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science/ Boekmanstudies, 2006. This study is also available on the web www.minocw.nl/documenten/boekman_cult3.pdf.

Different aspects of museum policy are also included in the Netherlands chapter of *Compendium on Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*: www.culturalpolicies.net.

www.museumserver.nl

Is the platform for Dutch museums on the Internet. Currently 582 websites of the Dutch museums are included in Dutch and most of those also in English.

www.museumvereniging.nl

Is the website of the Netherlands Museum Association in Dutch and English.

www.minocw.nl

Is the website of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in Dutch and English. Extensive information on cultural policy, including policy documents is available online.

www.cbs.nl

Is the website of the Statistics Netherlands in Dutch and English. This website includes the central electronic database, called StatLine. At present, however, the English version of StatLine contains only a few matrices; it is to be expanded in the near future.

www.scp.nl

Is the website of the Social and Cultural Planning Office in Dutch and English. The SCP conducts an ongoing survey on cultural participation in The Netherlands. Museums visits are included in the survey. Practically all publications of the SCP are available online